

AI-driven data technology helps deliver deeper operational insights and improved client service

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Jim Boyer, CIO, Ice Miller

National US law firm Ice Miller is stepping confidently into a new era of AI-driven technology to gain deeper operational insights into its business and, more importantly, enrich the services it offers its diverse international client base.

Guided by the business intelligence team at Harbor, the firm, which has more than 350 lawyers and legal professionals, has onboarded a sophisticated cloud-based AI-powered data platform from Microsoft. Armed with the application, it is creating cutting-edge models that simplify the process of data analysis to provide quicker and more meaningful insights to its subject matter experts and more proactive and informed advice to clients operating in an unpredictable economy.

James Boyer, CIO at Ice Miller, says the firm engaged Harbor because it aspired to embrace the latest data technology trends but wisely was aware it "didn't know what it didn't know".

"We were new to this space. Our aim was to enable self-serve data analytics for our firm's support functions. But to do that, we needed to retool from a product and resources perspective," says Boyer. "That's why we picked Harbor to assist us. They recommended a way forward and gave us a great kick start."

Disconnected data estate

The move was driven by a need to centralize its data estate. Although Ice Miller had financial and legal data available, it couldn't connect the dots to gather the enhanced business and competitor intelligence it needed.

"Our biggest pain point was that we didn't know ourselves well enough," explains Boyer. "We had high-level information but needed to dig deeper to discover our strengths and where the opportunities lay ahead."

Boyer says the issue with traditional data integration and reporting methods is that information quickly goes stale. "You connect two information sources using a pre-agreed structure for a specific user case. But because we operate in a very competitive market, our needs change quickly. What works today is not what you need for tomorrow."

Ice Miller wanted a platform that would empower their subject matter experts to perform flexible data manipulations to support a range of analyses and provide up-to-the-minute reporting from one source of truth.

AI offers rapid data analysis

To this end Harbor demonstrated what was possible using cloud-first storage, big data architecture and modern data transformation techniques.

"A data platform fit for the age of AI was the goal," expounds Boyer. "Microsoft Fabric matched that perfectly. It has native integration with Microsoft's AI tool, Copilot.

Fabric acts as a lake to store all types of firm data and information from third-party sources. It facilitates rapid data transformation and has modelling tools that automatically build data sets for faster analysis and more informative visualizations.

"When we adopt Copilot, we can build Generative AI tools, such as chatbots, that can be trained to query the data stored in Fabric and return results," explains Boyer. "The platform will short-cut the time and effort required for the upfront engineering that typically takes place when a data integration project is undertaken."

To test its capabilities, Harbor helped Ice Miller create a collections report drawing on the firm's financial system data from Elite 3E as a proof-of-concept solution.

"It combines client matter and collection information across various date ranges and displays it in a simple dashboard that updates daily. It's a simple but powerful metric that allows us to track one of our most important stats and informs our financial decision-making."

In the future, the firm can extract and combine data from any line of business system using the same fundamental model.

Growth and operational insights

Boyer says that using the platform to help analyze profitability will be another advantage. "To remain competitive, the firm must price matters correctly, and to do that, you need to know how you have priced similar matters in the past."

The firm's new data-crunching capabilities will improve business intelligence and planning. "Every law firm strategy

is built around growth. But constant growth isn't easy. You must be smart about where you are positioned and where you head in the market. You need to know what industries and what work are most profitable."

That's where the platform will provide fundamental insights, he says. "We will be able to ingest a wide range of prospecting data and see if the opportunities match our capabilities."

Proactive service delivery

But ultimately, it is in client service that Boyer hopes the new data environment has its most telling impact.

"The ability to import litigation data, court records, and upcoming legislation across different jurisdictions and then use AI to normalize it and provide insights that we can use to provide more informed advice will be a game changer."

The power of AI data analysis to ingest vast sets of structured and unstructured data, which can then be queried and analyzed to deduce trends, will increase the firm's ability to serve, hopes Boyer. "It will allow us to be more proactive, provide informed client guidance and minimize foreseeable risks."

He also hopes to use the platform to enable a portal that clients can visit to manage real-time budget tracking and gain 24/7 access to matter data without relying on email communications.

Says Boyer: "Harbor helped ensure we use best practice design patterns, advised us on our data governance needs, and what resources we may need in the future. That guidance, in tandem with Fabric's data mesh technology, has ensured we have a solid foundation for future reporting and analytics efforts. Best of all, we now have a repeatable and flexible data architecture to create solutions that evolve with the firm."



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